



NEWS RELEASE

Date: Thursday, April 20, 2006
District: 5 (Santa Barbara, SLO, Monterey, Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties)
Contact: Susana Z. Cruz (español) or Colin Jones
Phone: (805) 549-3138 or (805) 549-3189

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Committee focuses on suicide prevention at Cold Spring Bridge

The Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge Suicide Prevention Committee will host a town hall meeting from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday, May 22, at Santa Barbara City College, BC245 Forum Room, 721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara.

The committee has identified numerous possible strategies for preventing suicide on the bridge, including fencing, enhanced call boxes, signing and restricting access. Participants will be asked to provide input on these strategies for the bridge.

The meeting will also feature a video presentation of John Kevin Hines, 24, one of 26 known Golden Gate Bridge survivors, as well as information on suicide prevention.

Multi-agency staff will be available to receive comments and answer questions from the public.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY – Preventing suicides on Highway 154 at Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge is the main objective of a newly formed multi-agency committee.

“This community cares and wants to make it safer for everyone—and help is available,” said Dr. Lisa Firestone, The Glendon Association director of Research and Education, and suicidology specialist.

Since the bridge was built in 1964, 43 people have committed suicide at that location with 31 deaths occurring in the last 25 years, according to the county Sheriff's Department. It's not known how many people have been saved.

Recently, local law enforcement officers successfully rescued a person from committing suicide at the bridge. However, these incidents carry great risks for the deputies and officers involved in life or death rescue and recovery operations, according to Commander Dominic Palera of the county Sheriff's Department.

In November, the Cold Spring Canyon Arch Bridge Suicide Prevention Committee formed to help identify suicide prevention strategies at the bridge.



NEWS RELEASE

“This is a diverse community group,” said Nevin Sams, Caltrans District Traffic Safety engineer. “We’re working together to develop interim and permanent solutions.”

The committee’s membership includes Caltrans, The Glendon Association; county Sheriff’s Department; California Highway Patrol; Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG); Santa Barbara County; Family Service Agency; ACCESS Team; and the county Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services. Representatives from the offices of Assemblymember Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, and Third District Supervisor Brooks Firestone plan to attend the May 22 town hall meeting in Santa Barbara.

So far, the committee has identified the following suicide prevention strategies, and related findings, for the Cold Spring Bridge:

- **Signage** – Currently, a *No Loitering* sign is posted at the bridge. Other suggestions for signage include *We Care About You* or *Distress Center—We Listen 24 Hours a Day*. Both signs would include two suicide hotline numbers for assistance.
- **Call boxes** – Ideally, telephones would be located on both sides of the bridge and offer a direct 1-800 suicide hotline number as well as roadside assistance. Currently, the direct hotline service is not available in call boxes in California.
- **Video cameras** – Local law enforcement agencies do not have the resources to continually patrol the rural area or visually monitor the cameras. Either way, cameras do not prevent suicide, and may even serve as an attraction for it.
- **Lighting** – It’s not certain whether installing lights would help reduce suicides.
- **Chain-link fence barrier** – Partial barriers actually increase suicide incidents. An effective barrier is six feet tall. A tightly woven chain-link fence might be advisable.
- **Safety net** – A safety net installed on the bridge is an effective barrier for helping to reduce suicides.
- **Pedestrian/bicyclist access** – Restricting pedestrians and bicyclists from the bridge area would, most likely, impact local triathlon and hiking events.
- **Public parking/pull out areas** – It’s not certain whether restricting parking or closing off pull out areas would reduce suicides. The roadside locations are necessary for disabled vehicles, commuters, keeping the traffic moving and maintenance staff’s parking.
- **Surveillance** – Heightening surveillance efforts might be an effective suicide deterrent, but may require more law enforcement staffing and resources than is currently available.
- **Public education** – Educate the public on suicide prevention through the local media and community meetings and events. In addition, provide public awareness that dialing 9-1-1 is best for notifying law enforcement in emergencies.

For more information on suicide prevention, please call the 24-hour Suicide Prevention hotline at 2-1-1, or 1-800-400-1572, or visit the American Association of Suicidology web page at www.suicidology.org.

###